

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

AID-05 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-03 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03

CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 CU-02 /084 W

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R 150639Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1647

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 4312

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, PORG, PORS, SEATO, TH (HONGKADAROM, SUNTHORN)

SUBJECT: FAREWELL CALL ON SEATO SECRETARY-GENERAL

1. DURING MY FAREWELL CALL ON SEATO SEC GEN SUNTHORN HONGLADARON, I TOOK THE OCCASION TO INVITE HIS PERSONAL VIEWS ON THE CURRENT SEA SITUATION, THE PROSPECTS FOR ASEAN AND THAI DOMESTIC PROBLEMS.

2. SEA -- SUNTHORN EXPLAINED THE DIFFICULTY OF DEFINING AN ADEQUATE SOLUTION TO THE PREVAILING FORCES INVOLVED IN THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN CONFLICT I.E., THE INTENTIONS OF NORTH VIETNAM AND THEIR SUPPORTERS, THE PRC AND SOVIET UNION; WHOSE AIMS WERE CLEAR YET DID NOT COINCIDE. HE WAS EQUALLY CONCERNED OVER THE INSTABILITY OF THE LAOTIAN COALITION AND FOUND THE BACKDROP OF EVENTS DISCOURAGING FOR THAILAND AND THE GENERAL AREA. SUNTHORN WISTFULLY HOPED THAT THE US, SOVIETS AND PRC COULD ACT IN CONCERT TO CONTROL NVN EXPANSIONISM.

3. THE SEC GEN SPECULATED OVER THE PROSPECTS FOR SIHANOUK'S RETURN. HE BELIEVED SIHANOUK MIGHT PROVE A TEMPORARY BUFFER FROM THE MORE RADICAL KHMER ROUGE ELEMENTS. HE ALSO CONSIDERED THAT THE PRINCE IDENTIFIED
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HIMSELF WITH THAILAND SOMEWHAT SYMPATHETICALLY AND THROUGH

HIS MOTHER WHO HAD THAI BLOOD. SUNTHORN IMPLIED THAT CAMBODIA MIGHT POSE A GREATER PROBLEM TO THAILAND IF SIHANOUK DID NOT RETURN AS TITULAR LEADER.

4. ASEAN -- I POSED THE QUESTION OF ASEAN EVOLVING FROM ITS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ORIGINS INTO SOME FORM OF DEFENSIVE ALLIANCE WHICH WOULD HAVE A BEARING ON SEATO, PARTICULARLY IF ITS PRESENT MEMBERSHIP OF FIVE COULD ULTIMATELY EXPAND TO TEN. SUNTHORN BELIEVED THE PROSPECTS WERE REMOTE AT THE MOMENT AND THAT IT WOULD TAKE MANY YEARS FOR EVEN THE PRESENT RELATIONSHIP TO FULLY DEVELOP. HE CONCEDED THAT THE CURRENT ASEAN GROUPING WAS REASONABLY SUCCESSFUL AND THAT ITS MEMBERS WERE FINDING IT A USEFUL INSTRUMENT FROM WHICH TO BUILD. HOWEVER, ONE HAD TO RECALL THAT MOST OF ITS MEMBERS HAD BEEN DOMINATED BY FOREIGN POWERS OVER LONG PERIODS OF TIME. CONSEQUENTLY, THEY HAD CONSIDERED THEMSELVES PAWNS SUBJECT TO CONFLICTING GREAT POWER ALLIANCES. IN HIS JUDGEMENT THESE NEWLY INDEPENDENT NATIONS WERE NOT PREPARED NOR WILLING TO PROMPTLY TRADE THEIR PRESENT SOVERIEGNTY FOR NEW AND UNCERTAIN ALLIANCES. THEY WOULD MOVE SLOWLY AND ONLY TIME WOULD PERMIT ANY COHESIVE DEFENSIVE ARRANGEMENTS TO EVOLVE.

5. THAILAND -- THE SECGEN RECOGNIZED THE CURRENT THAI DOMESTIC DIFFICULTIES AND DEFINED THE THREE KAY GROUPS WHICH ONE SHOULD WATCH. THEY WERE THE ELITE, THE MIDDLE CLASS (MOSTLY BUSINESSMEN) AND THE LARGER CLASS OF WORKERS AND ARMERS. SUNTHORN CONSIDERED THE FIRST TWO AS MOST IMPORTANT BECAUSE THEY WERE CONCERNED OVER MAINTAINING A STABLE GOVERNMENT. HE DECLARED THE LATTER GROUP DID NOT CARE WHO WAS PRIME MINISTER. WHAT BOTHERED SUNTHORN MOST WERE THE STUDENTS AND THE LABOR DISPUTES. SUNTHORN THOUGHT NO GOVERNMENT COULD SUCCEED IF DICTATED TO BY THE STUDENTS. HE ALSO HAD HARSH WORDS FOR LABOR DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS WHOM HE CONSIDERED WEAK. THE STUDENT ELEMENT HAD GOTTEN OUT OF HAND AND SEEMED TO BE INFLUENCED INCREASINGLY FROM THE OUTSIDE. ALTHOUGH SANYA HAD NOT DEALT FIRMLY WITH THESE MATTERS OWING TO HIS CARETAKER MANDATE, SUNTHORN WAS CONVINCED THAT BOTH SENI AND KHUKRIT WERE PREPARED TO EXERCISE DISCIPLINE OVER THESE GROUPS.

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HE BELIEVED THAT ANY ELECTED GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE POPULAR SUPPORT FOR TAKING ANY ACTIONS NEEDED TO NEUTRALIZE THE AGITATORS.

6. IN AN ASIDE RELATED TO THE LIFTING OF THE US ARMS EMBARGO ON PAKISTAN AND THE INDIAN REACTION THERETO, SUNTHORN COMMENTED THAT THE THAI ALWAYS HAD TROUBLE WITH THE INDIANS BOTH POLITICALLY AND COMMERCIALY SINCE THEY

NEVER LIVED UP TO THEIR AGREEMENTS. HE THEN VOLUNTEERED
AN OLD THAI PROVERB TO THE EFFECT THAT IF A THAI WALKED
INTO A GROUP OF SNAKES AND INDIANS, THE THAI ALWAYS HIT
THE INDIANS OVER THE HEAD FIRST.
KINTNER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 15 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BANGKO04312
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750091-0353
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750347/aaaabqkn.tel
Line Count: 120
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 JUL 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <20 NOV 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FAREWELL CALL ON SEATO SECRETARY-GENERAL
TAGS: MARR, PORO, PORS, TH, XC, SEATO, (SUNTHORN HONGLADAROM)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006